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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 007177

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SUBJECT: FRANCE SEES POST-DEBY CHAD APPROACHING

REF: A. PARIS 6845 B. PARIS 4448 C. PARIS 846 D.

PARIS 2067 E. PARIS 7992 (2005)

Classified By: Acting DCM Josiah B. Rosenblatt. Reasons 1.4b,d

¶1. (C) Summary: President Chirac's African Affairs Counselor Michel de Bonnecorse admitted to visiting U.S. Ambassador to Chad Marc Wall in an October 20 meeting that Deby's Presidency could be nearing its close, with assassination a growing possibility. The manner and place of Deby's demise -- by assassination, sickness or accident, at home or abroad -- would determine both the French response and Deby's succession. Bonnecorse said that French President Chirac had admonished Deby about reported recruitment of child soldiers within the Chadian military, warning Chad risked a review of French military cooperation if the charges proved true. Regarding Darfur and the risk to refugees in Chad, Bonnecorse commented on Deby's ambivalent view of UNSCR 1706 and the possible deployment of UN elements on Chadian territory. Bonnecorse speculated on options for some form of an interpositionary force in Chad and pledged French logistical support. Comment: Official French discussions of Chad are beginning to envision the inevitability, even imminence, of a post-Deby Chad. End Comment and Summary.

Deby's Demise on the Horizon

¶2. (C) Michel de Bonnecorse, President Chirac's African Affairs Counselor, admitted in an October 20 meeting with Marc Wall, U.S. Ambassador to Chad, and Embassy Africa Watcher that President Idriss Deby could be gone from power sooner rather than later. The manner and place of his demise -- most likely by assassination or an accident, whether at home or abroad -- would determine both the French response and Deby's succession, Bonnecorse said. Fealty to Deby among the military had weakened and officers were being transferred more frequently, he said. Nonetheless, Deby was brimming with self-confidence, following the defeat of rebel forces in April, his self-perceived triumph over the World Bank, his replenished personal treasury, and satisfaction at his electoral victory and investiture. Bonnecorse suggested Deby's assassin would likely take control in Chad, though death through an accident, illness, or while abroad, could sow confusion and prompt half-brother Daoussa Deby to attempt to grab power. Any successor would likely emerge from Deby's own clan; however, Chad would not be the better for Deby's demise, Bonnecorse asserted.

Limits of French Military Engagement in Chad

¶3. (C) Bonnecorse related that French President Chirac had

recently admonished Deby about a UN report alleging recruitment of child soldiers within the Chadian military. Deby protested ignorance of the charge. Chirac nonetheless warned that such a development, if verified, could trigger a review of French military cooperation with Chad. Bonnetcorse recalled that the role of French military forces in Chad was restricted to protection against foreign aggression. He explained that, as a rule, French forces would not open fire on Chadians. He remarked that French forces could still play a dissuasive role, short of engagement, with respect to Chadian rebels. When Deby asked for French military intervention during the April battles in Chad, Bonnetcorse had declined and had underscored to Deby that the rebel columns were at least 70 percent Chadian in composition. Although French forces had fired warning shots, the French response fell far short of the robust intervention sought by several African heads of state, according to Bonnetcorse.

Options for International Forces in Chad

14. (C) Turning to UNSCR 1706, which mandates transition to UN forces in Darfur as well as a UN presence along the Darfur border in Chad and Central African Republic, Bonnetcorse remarked on Deby's ambivalence in contrast to CAR President Bozize's clear support. Bonnetcorse suggested however that the Security Council ought to spell out whether the UN elements in Chad would have a humanitarian mission or provide border security. In any event, Bonnetcorse pledged the logistical support of French forces in Chad, though these would maintain their bilateral mission and would not serve under a UN flag. He believed Chad could make available about 2,000 personnel and C.A.R. a further 500 forces. France could potentially dispatch some gendarmes. Bonnetcorse noted

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the option of making such a deployment the first phase of the larger UN operation foreseen in UNSCR 1706, he said, with a focus on securing humanitarian corridors. However, he reiterated previous reservations (Ref A) to the effect that such an international force could indirectly abet the ethnic cleansing of Darfur by spurring a further exodus of refugees into secure Chadian territory.

15. (C) For now, Bonnetcorse saw no imminent risk to the refugee camps in Chad apart from possible violence at the hands of local Chadians who were envious of the camps perceived advantages, like potable water and childbirth assistance, and irritated that camp refugees continued to forage outside camp perimeters for firewood that was already in short supply. Humanitarian convoys had already been pillaged, he noted. Bonnetcorse avowed he continued to mull over the option of supplementing camp security through deployment of a modest African gendarme force, 200-250 in size (Ref B). France could play a pivotal role, he offered, both in recruitment of personnel from francophone African states like Senegal, but also in securing EU funding. Ambassador Wall confirmed strong USG interest in the possibility of an internationally supported gendarme protection force.

Political Dialogue a Pipe Dream

16. (C) Ambassador Wall asked Bonnetcorse about prospects for international mediation within Chad. Bonnetcorse was dismissive, recalling the abortive efforts and pessimistic assessment of the Austrian EU presidency. Reforming the electoral framework might be feasible, but wider reconciliation was unlikely, he judged, noting that the EU had managed to instigate some reform in Togo by conditioning its assistance to progress on electoral rules. Chadian opposition however would continue to boycott the political process in any event, he predicted. Bonnetcorse derided the notion of political dialogue in Chad as an oxymoron, referring to his experience after multiple trips to Chad and

meetings with Deby in Paris over four years. Asked by Ambassador Wall whether France had contact with the Chadian opposition in Paris, Bonnetcorse responded that he only met with Chadians affiliated with official democratic parties. He noted he had rebuffed a meeting request from an Erdimi brother.

French Attempts to Make Deby a Good Citizen

¶7. (C) In addition to Chirac's recent rebuke to Deby about the possible presence of child soldiers in the Chadian military, Bonnetcorse claimed a series of interventions by France to shape Deby's behavior. Harkening back to Deby's tussle with the World Bank, Bonnetcorse claimed that Chirac had repeatedly urged Deby to enter into dialogue with Bank President Wolfowitz. France moreover has consistently told Deby to use his petrol dollars on behalf of the population, instead of arms purchases, which were well beyond the needs of Chad, according to Bonnetcorse. Another essential message from France has been to respect the February 2006 Tripoli Accord and to cease abetting rebels in Sudan. Bonnetcorse noted he had intervened strongly, if unsuccessfully, with Deby on behalf of the Guatemalan candidacy for UNSC election, arguing Chadian interests would not be served by the election of "that imbecile" from Venezuela.

Comment: France Starting to Think About Chad After Deby

¶8. (C) Chad, for Bonnetcorse, represents a fragile territory disguised as a state. Its leadership consists of warlords who project control but do not govern. A Southerner ought to rule Chad by rights, given the imbalances in population, in his view. Deby was more and more vulnerable, despite an almost willful euphoria since he repulsed the April rebel offensive. Deby could perish soon, even very soon, Bonnetcorse volunteered, in a rare acknowledgment. France would adapt, as required. It was startling to hear Bonnetcorse describe the inquiries of Deputy Secretary Zoellick (Refs C, D) about French thinking on succession as, in his view, an American invitation, with diplomatic sugarcoating, for a team effort to shunt Deby aside. At that point, our French interlocutors persisted in categorizing Deby as indispensable (Ref E). Now they are starting to envision a Deby-less Chad as inevitable, possibly even imminent, but they still would rather not dwell on what may

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follow, except to evoke a presentiment of nostalgia for the passing era of Idriss Deby.

¶9. (U) Ambassador Marc Wall cleared this report.

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